



## Preparation of Palm Beach County Students




### Ensuring College Access and Success

Our community faces challenges with college access. Of the most recent graduating high school class from the School District of Palm Beach County, fewer than 70 percent enrolled in college the fall after graduation. For students from low-income families, fewer than 60 percent enrolled.

Those who do enroll in college face challenges with successful completion. Of the graduating class of 2010, only two-thirds of those who started college received an Associate's or Bachelor's degree within six years. Only 53 percent of the low-income students who enrolled in college in 2010 received a degree within six years.

### Our Approach

In May of 2015, a broad group of community leaders came together to discuss this issue. A working group was formed to create a strategic plan that would serve as a blueprint for the Partnership moving forward, focused on improving college access and completion for Palm Beach County.



**OUR VISION** is that every Palm Beach County high school graduate completes a post-secondary credential within six-years of high school graduation that prepares them for a meaningful career with a sustainable wage.

**OUR MISSION** is to collectively ensure an integrated and effective system of supports from middle school through post-secondary that empowers students for career success.

In designing and implementing this work, the Partnership is committed to the following **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**:

- The term "college completion" includes any form of post-secondary credential. This encompasses Bachelor's and Associate's degrees as well as professional certificates.

- The voices of students and parents are essential in designing approaches to increase access and completion.
- The initiative must intentionally consider all types of students and be inclusive of the many diverse communities within Palm Beach County.
- The route to and through college may be different for each student, requiring individualized options and supports that meet students' unique needs and interests.
- Collective impact provides a framework for collaboration, alignment and synergy that will most efficiently maximize community efforts to improve college access and completion outcomes.

### Our Work

In order to understand how best to improve college access and completion, the Partnership commissioned a research study of the needs of Palm Beach County students. This study included review of performance data for Palm Beach County, a scan of current programs and services, and in-depth stakeholder conversations with the following groups:

- students in high school and in college,
- advisors to high school and college students,
- parents,
- community leaders,
- and providers of college access and completion support.

Based upon this research and effective practices in other communities, we determined the most promising areas to address first through our strategic plan.

## PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT



Parent support can propel a student to college or derail them. Many parents do not understand the long-term financial advantages of a college credential. Parents also need financial literacy regarding funding for college and an understanding of various post-secondary options.

## POST-SECONDARY ADVISING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



High school counselors have numerous duties and responsibilities. While high school counselors should be supported to provide additional and more in-depth support for college access, they must also continue to address numerous student needs including social and emotional support, student course and program selection, and academic support toward graduation. Successful efforts to increase college access in other communities have added support from external partners to high schools for dedicated, individualized post-secondary advising, including support from volunteers, professional staff, teachers, peers and online resources.



## FAFSA COMPLETION



A significant predictor of college access is completion of the FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid.) The FAFSA is generally required for consideration for all needs-based aid, not just federal aid. FAFSA completion rates at Palm Beach County high schools vary from 35 percent to 70 percent of graduating seniors.

Fewer than 25 percent of Palm Beach students receive the state-funded scholarship, Bright Futures. Even at the highest levels the Bright Futures scholarship covers less than 60 percent of tuition at a Florida public college. Therefore for middle and low-income students, completion of the FAFSA is essential for college affordability.

## SCHOLARSHIPS, NON-FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS



Results in Palm Beach County and across the nation demonstrate that getting to college is much easier than getting through college. Our research revealed a number of barriers along the route through college that students must overcome in order to succeed. These include sustained funding for not only tuition but fees, books, and unexpected emergencies; academic advising support to select the best programs of study and necessary courses; navigation of rules and processes required for timely registration, withdrawal and payments; and social and emotional support to adjust to a college environment.

## Your Role

Over 40 government, nonprofit and corporate partners have been actively involved in this strategic planning effort and are committed to supporting its implementation. Your organization can also join this collective impact approach to improve college access and completion for Palm Beach County students. Please consider one or more of the following opportunities:

- Provide a financial contribution to support the work
- Join a Strategy Team to design and guide the community approach within one of the four areas of focus
- Join a Support Team to assist with communication, data or outreach
- Be an advocate for the effort by creating an opportunity for the initiative leadership to present to a civic, professional or community group.

For more information, visit [achievebc.org](http://achievebc.org) or email [info@achievebc.org](mailto:info@achievebc.org)